

Police murder of 15 year old sparks youth uprising across Greece

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On Saturday 6 December in the mid-evening a member of a police car patrol shot a young school student, Alexandros-Andreas Grigoropoulos. Many local witnesses in the Exarchia district, where it took place, testify that this was an unprovoked and cold-blooded killing.

However the police, initially backed by the media, circulated lies that the police were under attack and responded by firing at the ground, resulting in an accidental ricochet killing the youth. There is amateur video footage to prove the police were lying and now the cop concerned has been arrested and charged with murder. Perhaps because Alexis was the son of a bank manager, the Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis has apologised for his killing and ministers have offered their resignations.

Militant response

The brutal murder, compounded by the initial cover up, fuelled the anger amongst young people that has erupted every night since. Spontaneous demonstrations and clashes with the police broke out in Athens and in many centres across Greece as the news of the killing spread. Rioting also erupted in at least four big university towns from Salonika in the north, Patras in the south, Heraklion on Crete and Ioannina in the west, but also on a number of islands, including Corfu.

In Athens thousands demonstrated on the first night and came under savage attack from the police, who concentrated their efforts on the demonstrators rather than protecting property: obviously in the hope that the widespread damage might turn public opinion in their favour. It seems to have had little effect. All over Greece thousands of high school and university students marched against local police stations and are now on strike. In Patras highly organized demonstrators confronted the police, who made extensive use of acrid disabling chemical powder to break up the demonstrations during the clashes, which spread to the streets around the Polytechnic, also located in Exarchia.

Athens Polytechnic was the scene of the famous student uprising of November 1973 against the infamous dictatorship of the Colonels. Also the University of Athens and most other institutions of higher education in Greece were occupied.

On the night of Monday 8 two major demonstrations took place in Athens, one at Omonia Square organized by the Greek Communist Party (KKE), the other by the rest of the left headed by the SYRIZA, a coalition of left parties plus the Greek Social Forum. The latter is reported as 40,000 strong, a huge mobilization. It resisted repeated attacks and provocations from the police, combating the use of chemicals. The demonstrators carried a huge banner with the slogan 'Time to Throw Them Out!' University teachers have proposed a three-day strike till Wednesday and the Teachers' Federation has called a 24-hour strike on Tuesday. The General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), the main union federation, had already planned a one-day general strike for Wednesday 10. Demonstrations in solidarity with the

Greek youth have taken place in Berlin and London. **A reactionary government in deepening crisis**
Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis - whose government's neoliberal reforms have added to the economic hardship faced by working class people has denounced "the extremist elements who exploited the tragedy", threatening that "unacceptable and dangerous events cannot and will not be tolerated." Despite the tough talk, the government with only a one seat majority in parliament is not a strong one. It has been wracked by corruption scandals, losing three ministers over the last 12 months. The movement is demanding the government's resignation and has now been joined in the call by the main opposition party, Pasok. Social and economic conditions in Greece are deteriorating rapidly. With one in five living below the poverty line, there is growing anger at the policies of a government determined to slash the budget deficit. Unemployment stands at 8 per cent overall but is much higher amongst the younger generation - especially those aged 20 to 25 - and inflation is rampant. Many young workers can barely surviving on €500 (£430) a month. Mass protests fighting to bring down the government, fierce clashes with the police and a deepening economic crisis, all add to what looks increasingly like a pre-revolutionary situation in Greece.

Crisis of leadership

Much will now depend on the actions of the trade unions and the left parties. George Papandreou of Pasok a left bourgeois populist party with a social democratic coloration - is the traditional instrument to step into such situations and save the ruling classes' bacon. The union leaders have altered their plans so that the general strike does not lead to a mass demonstration, just as the KKE as usual will not join with the rest of the left in a common front of struggle against the police and the government. Will the unions and Pasok, perhaps with the aid of the KKE, which has described the left and the militant youth as provocateurs, succeed in defusing the situation by one day actions and splitting the older workers from the youth? Certainly the leaders seem to be doing all they can in this direction. Or can the rank and file workers and the youth, if given a lead by the far left groups, the Social Forum, etc, force the leaders to abandon mediation and go for confrontation with the government? The calls of the Greek Social Forum and the Communist Organisation of Greece KOE are at least encouraging "The government of austerity measures, of complicity in land development of huge proportions in collaboration with some Holy Mountain monasteries, of selling-off everything in the land (from ports and air companies to telecommunications and public education) must be overthrown by this huge movement of people's rage." (8 December 2008). Certainly an all out, indefinite general strike mobilized and organized by local councils of workers and students delegates - could not only topple Karamanlis, but even install a workers' government, composed of the left and the workers parties, controlled by the workers' councils. **A Europe wide struggle**

Neither are events in Greece taking place against the backdrop of a peaceful or passive Europe. In Italy this week (12 December) there will be another one-day general strike along with youth and student mobilizations against the neoliberal reforms to education of the Berlusconi government. Last week Ireland witnessed huge demonstrations against similar reforms. Before that it was the turn of Germany and Spain. Thus it is no surprise that solidly the right wing London paper The Daily Telegraph commented about the Greek youth uprising: "Similar outbreaks are possible in other countries. Recessions are always tough on the young. And while the Greek rioter's slogan - "bullets for your youth, money for your banks" - may not qualify as sound socioeconomic analysis, it has a catchy ring."

Indeed! We need to ensure that the youth uprising spreads right across Europe, taking up the slogan of the Italians we won't pay for their crisis - opposing the widespread police harassment and media demonising of young people because they won't take deteriorating education, unemployment or dead end jobs as their lot in life. But as is already happening in Italy the movement must spread to and bring to the fore the working class, threatened with massive job losses and factory closures. All together tous ensemble as the French workers and students did in the anti-CPE movement; we can throw back the efforts of our rulers to make

us pay for the deepening crisis of their system, and call the very system itself into question.

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